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## MOORE'S PARADOX: ONE OR TWO?

By J. N. WILLIAMS

DISCUSSIONS of what is sometimes called 'Moore's paradox' are often vitiated by a failure to notice that there are two paradoxes; not merely one in two sets of linguistic clothing. The two paradoxes are absurd, but in different ways, and accordingly require different explanations.

Moore himself seems guilty of this failure. In one place he wants to discuss why 'I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did' is 'a perfectly absurd thing to say', while in another he is puzzled by the fact that "... it is absurd to say such a thing as 'I believe he has gone out, but he has not' ...".

The two things which Moore alleged it would be absurd for a speaker *A* to say can be expressed as

- (i) '*p* and it is not the case *A* believes that *p*', (e.g. 'I went to the pictures last Tuesday but I don't believe that I did').
- (ii) '*p* and *A* believes that it is not the case that *p*', (e.g. 'I believe that he has gone out but he has not').

Sentences of these two forms do not express the same proposition, nor does *A* commit the same absurdity in uttering both.

The proposition expressed by (i) neither entails nor is entailed by that expressed by (ii). The distinction between them corresponds to the well known distinction between

- (iii) 'It is not the case that  $\mathcal{A}$  believes that  $p$ ', and
- (iv) ' $\mathcal{A}$  believes that it is not the case that  $p$ '.

The proposition expressed by (iii) neither entails nor is entailed by that expressed by (iv).

It is now uncontentious that the absurdity of  $\mathcal{A}$ 's saying either (i) or (ii) does not come from the self-contradictoriness of (i) or (ii). In both, what is expressed is possibly true, whereas what is self-contradictory is not. In both cases the absurdity lies not in what  $\mathcal{A}$  says, but in the conjunction of what  $\mathcal{A}$  says with his saying of what he says.

In saying ' $p$ ' one normally suggests that one believes that  $p$ , or expresses a belief that  $p$ . It is this suggestion or expression of belief that  $p$  in conjunction with the assertion, in the case of (i), that one does not believe that  $p$  or, in the case of (ii), that one believes that it is not the case that  $p$ , which gives rise to the absurdity.

But here the absurdity of (i) differs from that of (ii). For normally, it is absurd for  $\mathcal{A}$  to assert (i) because what is conjointly expressed and asserted, i.e. a belief that  $p$  and a lack of belief that  $p$ , is *logically impossible*.

The absurdity in (ii) is of a different kind. For normally, it is absurd for  $\mathcal{A}$  to assert (ii), not because what is conjointly expressed and asserted, i.e. a belief that  $p$  and a belief that it is not the case that  $p$ , is logically impossible, but because it is *inconsistent*.

## REFERENCES

- G. E. Moore, 'A Reply to My Critics' in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* ed. P. A. Schlipp (Evanston 1942), p. 543; 'Russell's Theory of Descriptions' in *The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* ed. P. A. Schlipp (Evanston 1944), p. 204.
- D. M. Armstrong, 'Does Knowledge Entail Belief?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1969-70 who, while seeing the difference in sentential form, does not indicate that the difference is anything else.
- M. Black, 'Saying and Disbelieving', *ANALYSIS* 13 1952/53, who cites the passages from Moore without differentiating them and who says of the latter passage that it is 'Moore's latest statement of *the point*' (p. 26, my emphasis).
- M. Deutscher, 'A Note on Saying and Disbelieving', *ANALYSIS* 25 1964/65, and 'Bonney on Saying and Disbelieving', *ANALYSIS* 27 1966/67, whose earlier analysis works for (ii) but not for (i) and whose later analysis works for both but fails to bring out their difference, where the later analysis is a modification of the earlier, despite the fact that the paradox accounted for in the later way is (i), whereas that accounted for in the unmodified way is (ii).
- J. Hintikka, *Knowledge and Belief* (Ithica 1962), who refers to 'Moore's problem' (pp. 9, 64, 78 and 95) and who deals only with (i) (pp. 9 and 64) despite referring to passages in which Moore is concerned not only with (i) but also with (ii) (p. 64, footnote 2).
- A. R. White, *Modal Thinking* (Oxford 1975) who, citing (i) and (ii) together, refers to them alike as 'the well known pragmatic paradox' and as 'this paradox' (p. 172).